

## Carbon footprints and hoofprints

Text by Tom Reed

Anyone who reads Horse International is devoted to horses and to equestrian sport or breeding...or both! But there has been very little discussion among us about the environmental impacts of our passion. We have taken a species of animal that in its natural state is in harmony with its environment and put it to uses that

engage our minds, bodies, and imagination but impose a huge toll on Mother Earth. Because of what we do with our horses, their environmental impacts are very large.

We drive our horses around to shows, or to stud, or to the vet using diesel- or gasoline-guzzling lorries and jeeps. The very best of our horses travel tens of thousands of miles or more in aircraft each year as they go from 5\* show to 5\* show around the world.

We feed them hay that has been transported across scores or hundreds of miles, and sometimes that fodder is sent across the ocean from places like Canada to Europe and the Middle East. The feed we give our horses has environmental impacts through the production process and transport. The manure they make produces greenhouse gases (albeit much less per head than the amount produced by cows). Shoes we put on our horse's feet are crafted in far-away places, and may be manufactured using dirty coal before they are shipped halfway around the world to our farriers. Even the medicines we use to keep our horses healthy have their own environmental and human health impacts through production, distribution, and antimicrobial resistance. We all have taken steps to reduce our personal carbon footprints and the environmental burdens we impose on the earth. The open secret is that our horses' carbon hoofprints are wide and deep. We must turn our attention to mitigating these carbon hoofprints if our horses, our industry, and our life's passion are to become environmentally sustainable.



## Sport

Since the beginning of the last decade the FEI has led the way with environmental action plans and guidance for its affiliates and show organizers. In 2014 the FEI published its "Sustainability Handbook for Event Organisers". This is a very useful and comprehensive guide in which the FEI President wrote: "This handbook aims to encourage event organisers to implement various sustainability initiatives that will help reduce negative environmental impact and create a positive legacy." In both 2019 and 2020, the FEI won the IOC-Dow Carbon Action Award, "which recognises the sustainability efforts of sports organisations within the Olympic Movement". The FEI ameliorates much of the negative effects of the carbon it produces by purchasing high-quality carbon offsets. Carbon offsets, along with the actions the FEI has taken at its headquarters to reduce energy consumption and non-recycled waste, are very noteworthy. But much more action must be taken, and especially with respect to the FEI's affiliates and the affiliates' members.

## A commitment

If it has not done so already, the FEI should announce a commitment to become "carbon negative" in the very near future, such as in 2022. And the FEI must move beyond merely *encouraging* its 136 National Federations to act in pro-climate and pro-environmental ways to actually *requiring* actions as a condition of membership and affiliation. Specifically, the actions that should be required in 2022 include that each National Federation must be carbon negative through the purchase of high-quality carbon offsets, and in 2023 each affiliate must produce and implement an action plan to reduce its negative environmental impacts.

## Last decade

To those who say that it's unfair or unreasonable to expect the 136 National Federations to act so quickly, the response is that they all have been aware of the FEI's actions over the last decade to increase its own environmental sustainability and reduce its own carbon footprint. National Federations that have not initiated their own programs to date cannot be excused from their responsibilities: They should have begun to take action at the same time as the FEI did. The FEI and National Federations also must use their authority as governing bodies of equestrian sport to require shows to become carbon negative in their own activities beginning in 2022. Each organiser, as part of its application for approval to run a show, must prove that it is carbon neutral as an organisation and with respect to all its direct activities, including the show for which it seeks approval. And rather than encouraging organisers to produce action plans as outlined in

the FEI's Handbook, organisers must be required to produce and implement action plans to reduce their negative environmental impacts, and to update those plans on a regular basis (such as every three years).

## Carbon neutral

As part of the annual registration of horses, athletes, and officials, each National Federation must be required under new FEI rules to require proof that the horse or human is no worse than "carbon neutral" with respect to its sport-related activities, on a calendar year basis in arrears. This rule would require the computation for each equine athlete (by its FEI-recognised owner), human athlete, and FEI official the carbon hoofprint or footprint it made in the prior calendar year in relation to sport activities, both national and international. And they would be required to prove that they have purchased from unaffiliated third parties sufficient high-quality carbon credits to offset the carbon produced by their sport-related activities. No horse or human would be allowed to compete or to serve as an FEI official unless the previous year's carbon hoofprint or footprint had been negated through carbon offsets purchased in the current calendar year.

The FEI could be helpful in the implementation of this rule by providing guidelines produced by an independent consultant that calculate the carbon impact of a wide range of standard activities. For example, each flight to/from continental Europe and North America for human or equine athlete would be assigned a standard footprint of a certain amount of carbon, and each flight from Australia to/from Europe would be assigned a different standard carbon footprint. A horse lorry would be assigned a standard carbon footprint per 1,000 kilometers travelled. This kind of standardised guide would make it much easier for individuals to calculate carbon hoofprints and footprints, provide transparency, and facilitate any audits that become necessary to validate reported data that appear unreasonable or inconsistent. To further reduce the computational burden of compliance, a minimum figure of carbon could be established for each horse, human athlete, and official based on the level of competition they are engaged in. Rather than the individual computing his or her own carbon footprint and the carbon footprint for each horse, they could use the standardized figures established by the FEI.

## Breeding

While the FEI has led the way in focusing at least some attention on the environmental impact of equestrian sport, we have had no such leadership in the breeding sector. The World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses (WBFSH) has been silent. For the WBFSH to speak and act with

authority on issues concerning climate change and environmental sustainability, it first must establish its own credibility through internal policies and actions. Only after doing so can the WBFSH speak with legitimacy to its members concerning policies, standards, and rules that impact them. The WBFSH should immediately commence the development of an action plan with respect to the organisation and its own activities. It should establish the objective of being carbon neutral in 2021 and climate negative in 2022 through the purchase of high-quality carbon offsets this year and a combination of carbon offsets and the implementation of an action plan next year. The organisation's constitution should be amended so that as a condition of membership every studbook must certify that it is carbon neutral by 2022 and carbon negative by 2023 with respect to own direct activities. The WBFSH could help studbooks engage their own members and breeders in carbon-consciousness by hiring an independent consultant to estimate the average carbon impact of a foal taking into account the activity that went into putting its dam in foal, the dam carrying the foal for eleven months, and the foal's first year of life. Studbooks could encourage breeders and members to purchase offsets at least equal to the amount of carbon produced with respect to each foal they register each year. Using educational resources developed by consultants for the WBFSH, each studbook also should be required to share digital versions of those materials with their members on an annual basis. These educational resources should highlight the carbon hoofprint of horses and provide suggestions for making horse ownership and breeding more environmentally sustainable. Progressive studbooks could voluntarily choose to act as an intermediary for owners who wish to negate the carbon hoofprints of their breeding mares, stallions, and other horses by purchasing high-quality carbon offsets.

## Unleash Creativity

The ideas proposed above can spur individuals to take further action. One studbook, the Warmblood Studbook of Ireland, in 2020 became what may be the first studbook in the world to commit to being carbon negative. And WSI announced elsewhere in this issue of Horse International a project to plant ten trees for each foal they register. (Disclosure: The author of this article is a founder of WSI.) By focusing the attention of the FEI, athletes, officials, the WBFSH, studbooks, owners, and breeders on issues of environmental sustainability, more creative projects will be launched. We need leadership from the FEI and WBFSH for this to happen on a big enough scale to make a difference to Mother Earth.